

Relations between rulers and ruled in the medieval Maghrib: the ‘social contract’ in the Almoravid and Almohad centuries, 1050-1250

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Abstract

This article approaches the notion of an Islamic social contract from the perspective of the Berber inhabitants of the Maghrib and their concern that the state should be just, with a particular focus on the period between 1050 and 1250 when the region was ruled by two successive indigenous imperial regimes, the Almoravids and the Almohads. It explores the gradual implantation of ideas of Islamic statehood in the region, their intersection with earlier indigenous beliefs and social practices, and the ‘naturalisation’ of Islamic philosophical ideas developed in the ‘Abbasid East and al-Andalus in the very different environment of the Maghrib. Two ideas of particular salience to the discussion are the Almoravid idea of a Mālikī ‘Commander of Truth or Law’, the *amīr al-ḥaqq*, and Almohad references to a utopian perfect city or polis, *al-madīna al-fāḍila*, in the context of their recognition of their spiritual father, Ibn Tūmart, as the *mahdī*.

Key words: Almoravids, Almohads, Islamic statehood, justice, *al-madīna al-fāḍila*.

Introduction

This article considers some aspects of the relations between different groups within society in the medieval Maghrib from the theoretical and practical perspectives. While the most evident contract in medieval Islamic society was arguably the *dhimma* or covenant extended to the peoples of the book to practice their religions in return for obedience and payment of the *jizya* tax to Muslim authorities, the concept of a social contract also implies the range of assumptions, stated or unstated, which inform people’s acceptance of particular social and political forms as normative. For the average person, prosperity and peace were key *desiderata* but for Muslim thinkers, religion was an inescapable aspect of life and a good society was never simply one that provided for people’s earthly needs but also one that led its people to salvation. These two concerns may be seen to be encapsulated in the terms justice, ‘*adl* or *qist*, and virtue, *faḍl* which figure repeatedly in the political philosophy of the tenth-century Islamic philosopher, al-Fārābī (d. c. 339/950). His work interacted with Arabic versions of Aristotelian, Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy and found readers and commentators in the Islamic west as well as the east, notably the

Andalusi philosopher, Ibn Bājja (d. 534/1139), who served the Almoravids for a time.

Al-Fārābī used the term ‘virtuous city’, *al-madīna al-fāḍila*, for a perfect society which was one that led its inhabitants to earthly and eternal happiness. Like other thinkers, he believed that the management of such a community required a ruler (*raʾīs*) who functioned as the conduit between a higher power, whether understood as the Active Intellect or God, and the ruled. While cities, peoples (*umam*) and universal empires (*al-maʿmūra*) could be virtuous, urban quarters, villages and by implication other rural constituencies such as tribes could not, because a perfect society was like a healthy body and required the same diverse range of specialisms for its full realisation.¹ Such philosophical constructs gave a paramount position to the ruler, the physician of the soul, but also imposed upon him ultimate responsibility for the welfare of those who served rather than participated in governance according to their skills and abilities. This vision was abstract, utopian and little concerned with the non-urban, and tension always existed between such hierarchical urban formulations and the much flatter, egalitarian structure implied by the early Islamic idea of the community of believers which had emerged from the meeting of Semitic monotheism and Arabian tribalism.² In what follows, I shall consider the evolution of Islamic statehood in the rural Maghrib, a tribal society like Arabia, and how by the twelfth century CE, a Maghribī tribal people had incorporated the theoretical notion of a virtuous (urban) society, *al-madīna al-fāḍila*, into their state ideology.

The evolution of Islamic statehood in the Maghrib

The development of Islamic statehood and concomitant ideas of the ethical relations that should exist between ruler and ruled followed a complicated path in the Maghrib which reflected numerous intersections between tribal society, pre-Islamic beliefs, sectarian Muslim positions, and religio-political universalism as understood in ʿAbbasid Baghdad or Umayyad Córdoba. The Islamic conquest itself was a long drawn-out process that involved ongoing interactions between two tribal peoples, the Arab invaders and the indigenous Maghribīs, the latter of whom came to be lumped together in Arabic writing as the Berbers although they did not see themselves as a single ‘race’.³ Indigenous tribes fought the newcomers, allied with them and rebelled against them. Such high levels of

¹ R. Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī’s ‘Mabādī’ Ārā’ Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1985), pp. 228-37. See also C. Butterworth, *Alfarabi The Political Writings: Selected Aphorisms and other Texts*, London and Ithaca: Cornell University Press (2001), pp. 12-13, 25-28.

² See Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997).

³ For a discussion of Arab conceptualisations of the Berbers, see Ramzi Rouighi, ‘The Berbers of the Arabs’, *Studia Islamica* 106: 1 (2011), pp. 49-76.

conflict slowed the pace of conquest but also generated intimacy through recruitment and the capture of Berber prisoners, male and female, who entered Arab Muslim ranks in a way that sedentary peasant populations, many of whom were Christian and thus inscribed in the new order as tax-paying *ahl al-dhimma*, did not.

As a result, the early relationship between the Arab warrior aristocracy, headed by the Umayyad caliph in Damascus, and the population of the Maghrib was not a simple equation of Muslim Arab 'ruler' and non-Muslim Berber 'ruled'. Berbers could be elite Muslim clients in the upper echelons of power such as Ṭāriq b. Ziyād, the conqueror of Iberia, fighters within the larger ruling elite, captives and slaves, including concubines, or tribes who were not subjugated or 'ruled' in any real sense. This parallelism between Arab and Berber power structures encouraged similar responses to the evolving Muslim state in its theoretical and practical manifestations. While Islam as a religious system based on a Prophet and a revealed book had evident appeal,⁴ a deeply rooted tribal distrust of authoritarianism, hierarchy and hereditary succession encouraged Berbers within the fledgling Islamic state structure to listen with a sympathetic ear to Kharijite missionaries calling for the maintenance of the primitive Islamic state with its quasi-tribal preference for a leader chosen for chiefly merits such as military prowess, political acumen and generosity, regardless of his genealogy.

Although the Kharijites had some success in Iraq, their greatest victory came in the Maghrib where numerous Berber fighters joined the widespread Kharijite rebellion of 739-41 which effectively ended Umayyad rule from Qayrawan to Ceuta and ultimately led to the formation of the first indigenous Muslim states in North Africa, the Ibādī Rustamid imamate with its capital at Tahart (Algeria), and the Ṣufrī Midrarid principality based at Sijilmasa (Morocco), both of which were supported by particular tribal coalitions. The Ibādīs, in particular, promoted a vision of Islamic statehood predicated on the leadership of a just and learned imam, even if this often proved to be an aspiration rather than a reality.⁵ The various biographies of Ibn Rustam, for instance, concur that he was selected by a convocation of Ibādī tribal chiefs who agreed that he was 'pious' and 'knowledgeable'.⁶ His frugal lifestyle, generosity, and even-handed treatment of tribal disputes are also noted as marks of a good ruler.

An 'Alid strand soon appeared too, personified in Idrīs b. 'Abd Allāh, Ḥasan b. 'Alī's great grandson and a missionary for the 'Alid cause, or a refugee from 'Abbasid persecution,

⁴ Michael Brett, 'The Islamisation of Morocco from the Arabs to the Almoravids' in idem, *Ibn Khaldūn and Medieval Maghrib*, Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999, Chapter I, p. 67.

⁵ For an analysis of the Ibādī imamate, see Adam Gaiser, *Muslims, Scholars, Soldiers: the origin and elaboration of the Ibādī imamate traditions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2010).

⁶ Virginie Prevost, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Rustum al-Fārisī. Une tentative de biographie du premier imam de Tāhart', *Der Islam* 86 (2011): 44-64, pp. 55-6.

or possibly both.⁷ Idrīs inserted himself into the Berber milieu as the imam of the Awraba Berbers of the Meknes-Zarhun region in the 780s and founded Fes. After his premature death, his client Rāshid supposedly persuaded the Awraba tribesmen to acknowledge his posthumous son, Idrīs II, whose descendants each ruled a different township and set of tribes within a loose Idrisid confederation. Although we know little about how the Idrisids or the Awraba conceptualised their relationship, the perception of genealogical charisma inherent in the descendants of the prophet is likely to have played a significant role in the emergence of their imamate. In this case, however, we may also surmise that the indigenous Maghribī mother of Idrīs II, the Nafza Berber Kanza, passed over in the Arabic chronicles as a maternal vessel, may have been a more powerful player in the perpetuation of the Idrīsī ‘priesthood’ than we realise, a point we shall explore further below. A vestige of this role may be reflected in Ibn Abī Zar’s allusion to Kanza advising her grandson, Muḥammad b. Idrīs, to give his brothers shares in his patrimony.

When Muḥammad came to power he divided the Maghrib between his brothers according to the advice of his grandmother Kanza, his father’s mother.⁸

Charismatic leadership rooted within particular tribes or tribal confederations can also be seen in the syncretic cults that emerged from the encounter of early Islamic rituals and beliefs with indigenous tribal cults. At the meeting point between Kharijism and cults practised on the Tamesna plain, which may have included a form of Judaism, the Barghawāṭa cult emerged, based on the notion of a Berber prophet, a Berber Qur’ān and prayer, fasting and feasting rituals which slightly altered those followed by the Arabs. Further south below the High Atlas, a mysterious descendant of Idrīs became the imam, championed by an equally mysterious Berber individual from the eastern Maghrib called Muḥammad b. Warsand al-Bajalī who encouraged some tribes of the Sus valley to blend local beliefs with Idrisid allegiance, thereby creating the Bajaliyya cult.

Muḥammad b. Warsand summoned them to curse the *ṣaḥāba* – may God be satisfied with them – and made forbidden things licit for them...they still follow his teaching (*madhhab*) today and [believe] that the imamate belongs to the

⁷ Although perceived from the Marinid era onwards as Sunni monarchs, Beck has demonstrated that this represents a rewriting of history and that the Idrisids, as one would expect given their genealogy, were ‘Alid or proto-Shī‘ī in orientation. Herman Beck, *l’Image d’Idrīs II, ses descendants de Fās et la politique sharīfienne des sultans marīnides, 656-869/1258-1465*, Leiden: Brill, 1989.

⁸ ‘Alī b. Abī Zar, *Al-Anīs al-Muṭrib bi-Rawḍ al-Qirṭās fī Akhbār Mulūk al-Maghrib wa-Tārīkh Madīnat Fās*, edited by Abdelwahab Benmansour, second edition, Rabat: Imprimerie Royale, 1999, p. 62.

progeny of al-Ḥasan not al-Ḥusayn. Their lord (*ṣāhibuhum*) is Idrīs Abū'l-Qāsim b. Muḥammad b. Ja'far b. 'Abd Allāh b. Idrīs.⁹

A similar pattern occurred, perhaps slightly later, in the northern Rif mountains among the Ghumāra tribes who adopted one of their own, Ḥā Mīm, as another Berber prophet bringing an adapted Berber Qur'ān and distinct but Islamising prayer and fasting rituals. One intriguing feature of the cult of Ḥā Mīm was the prominent role played within it by women who are so often absent from the male-dominated Arabic written corpus. Ḥā Mīm's aunt and sister are both mentioned as soothsayers within the cult and belief in his aunt, Tālīt or Tāngīt, is described by al-Bakrī as standing alongside belief in Ḥā Mīm himself as an object of faith.¹⁰

He gave them a scripture (*qur'ān*) in their tongue... In it [it said], 'I believe in Ḥā Mīm and Abī Khalaf', by which they meant the father of Ḥā Mīm who was known by that term of respect (*kunya*), 'and my head, my reason, and that which my breast conceals and my blood and flesh encase believes in Tāngīt', the aunt of Ḥā Mīm and the sister of Abī Khalaf Mann Allāh who was a soothsayer and sorceress. Ḥā Mīm also had a sister called Ḍaggū who was a soothsayer and sorceress of great beauty. They used to ask for her succour in every battle and adversity.

Such references to the role of female priestess-like figures adds weight to the possibility that the Idrīsid imamate derived some of its legitimacy from Idrīs I's Berber partner, Kanza.

These examples provide us with glimpses of a frequently hidden Maghribī social world in which the traditional beliefs of the Berber tribes began to be modified through their encounters with different early Islamic religio-political movements. They suggest that early Islamic or pseudo-Islamic political configurations depended on local tribal support and worked through consultative tribal mechanisms whilst superimposing charismatic religious leadership - often called an imamate - upon that structure. It is therefore likely that the notion of a contract between rulers and ruled in the post-conquest Maghrib followed the paradigm explained by Andrew Marsham for the early Umayyad *bay'a* which was informed by 'horizontal' pre-Islamic tribal alliance making as well as the

⁹ al-Bakrī, Abū 'Ubayd, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale par el Bekri*, texte Arabe, edited by W MacGuckin de Slane, [Algiers: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1857] Paris: Maisonneuve, 1965, p. 168.

¹⁰ al-Bakrī, *Description de l'Afrique septentrionale*, p. 100.

‘vertical’ allegiance offered by subjects to their imam-caliph.¹¹ Universal adherence to a single hierarchical political or religious authority such as the Umayyads or ‘Abbasids was notably absent. Different tribes or groups of tribes did not adopt Islam understood as a world monotheism but, rather, adhered to sectarian forms of it mediated by charismatic individuals, or created new versions of the faith relevant to their own group and its existing socio-political structures which may, on occasion, have included female leadership.

These structures did not necessarily conform to emerging Islamic urban social, religious or political norms but this general pattern persisted for several centuries in the Maghrib. Its essence was captured in a small comment by the late Almohad and early Marinid chronicler, Ibn ‘Idhārī, who described the western Maghrib as a region where every amir ruled according to his own *ḥukm*, a term which seems to denote both custom (‘urf) and belief, a situation that he contrasts with the rise of the Almoravid *amīr al-ḥaqq* (commander of [religious] truth or law) in the eleventh century.¹² The move towards an *amīr al-ḥaqq* began in the tenth century as a consequence of the great struggle between the Fatimids and the Umayyads of Cordoba to control the western Maghrib, a struggle that had both geo-political and religious aspects since each side claimed universal caliphal status but as representatives of different interpretations of Islam, Ismā‘īlī Shi‘ism in the case of the Fatimids and Malikism in that of the Umayyads.¹³ Religious exclusivity – the rejection of one’s rivals as infidels – was not unknown in the Maghrib but it became much more prominent during this period as did the idea of tribes entering larger Islamic religio-political formations. It was probably at this point that the idea of supra-tribal Berber peoples became operative with the Zanāta tending towards affiliation with the Umayyads and many central Maghribī Ṣanhāja supporting the Fatimids.

The clientage (*walāʾ*) with the Umayyads claimed by the Zanāta was not servile but highly contingent upon its socio-political value in the Maghribī tribal environment. Tenth-century Zanāta chiefs benefitted, for instance, by their appointment as Umayyad governors of Fes, a position that gave them additional power and prestige in comparison to their rivals. This brings us to the issue of the triangulation between the tribes, the small but growing urban populations of the Maghrib and universalising religio-political rule personified in a caliph, an imam or his representatives with all its attendant rights and responsibilities, including normative urban Islamic social relations. Although coercive

¹¹ Andrew Marsham, *Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: accession and succession in the first Muslim empire*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

¹² Ibn ‘Idhārī al-Marrākushī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib fī Akhbār al-Andalus wa’l-Maghrib*, edited by ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ‘Alī, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2009, vol. 4, pp. 9-11.

¹³ Although technically a legal *madhhab* rather than a sectarian position, Mālikī law did often play the latter role in the Maghrib where it was often synonymous with regional Sunnism.

power lay with the tribes, it was primarily in towns, where educated elites with some exposure to wider Islamic trends resided, that the parameters of the medieval Maghribī social contract took theoretical form and began to play a role in the urban exercise of soft power over the tribal hinterland. While tribes provided the ‘muscle’ for the construction of Islamic states in the Maghrib, it tended to be religious leaders educated in towns who articulated their projects, creating new urban-centric visions of the ideal Islamic state and society.

This new relationship began to emerge as some tribes’ aspirations became more universalist and imperial in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a period that witnessed the transformation from many amirs to the Almoravid *amīr al-ḥaqq* and then the rise of the Almohad *mahdī* and his caliphs, giving tribal constituencies a much larger stake in Islamised understandings of the relations between rulers and ruled. Both the Almoravids and Almohads claimed to be Islamic rulers and, therefore, engaged with the socio-legal contracts which held increasing sway in established (urban) Islamic societies, including the *bay‘a*, the *dhimma*, and norms governing canonical taxation which formed the legal underpinnings of justice, alongside more affective measures of performance that were linked to royal charisma (*baraka*) such as fertility, prosperity, and victory in battle.¹⁴

Monarchical failure, perceived or otherwise, in any of these areas could trigger rebellions and even the replacement of one dynasty or regime with another, viewed as more properly ‘Islamic’ than its predecessor. Threats from non-Muslim areas, the Christian north of the Iberian peninsula and the pagan African south, placed a premium on ‘Islamic’ military action, therefore, *jihād* figured largely in discourses about legitimate Islamic rule. Its discursive power was further enhanced by the fact that society itself was not fully Islamised and that Islamising impulses had been historically multifarious and sectarian.¹⁵ Equally important, especially in urban environments, was *ḥisba*, the maintenance of public justice and virtue by means of ‘commanding the good and prohibiting wrongdoing’ (*al-amr bi’l-ma‘rūf wa’l-nahy ‘an al-munkar*), which provided the practical means to achieve a virtuous society, *al-madīna al-fāḍila*, among the peoples of the Maghrib.

The Almoravids and the Mālikī ‘Amīr al-Ḥaqq’

¹⁴ The sociological and performative aspects of Almohad power are explored in detail in Mehdi Ghouirgate, *L’Ordre Almohade (1120-1269): une nouvelle lecture anthropologique*, Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, 2014.

¹⁵ I have discussed the role of *jihād* in the Maghrib extensively elsewhere. See Amira K. Bennison, *Jihad and its Interpretations in Precolonial Morocco*, London: Curzon, 2002; idem, ‘Abd al-Qādir’s *jihād* in the light of the western Islamic *jihād* tradition’, *Studia Islamica*, new series, 2 (2011): 7-28; idem, *The Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016 pp. 28-30, 78-9, 86-7, 239-41.

The Almoravids or al-Murābiṭūn were Ṣanhāja Berbers from the Sahara, drawn primarily from the Lamtūna, Lamṭa and Masūfa tribes, who united behind the preacher ‘Abd Allāh b. Yāsīn and the Lamtūna chiefs, Yaḥyā and Abū Bakr b. ‘Umar, in the 1040s. Ibn Yāsīn was influenced by the Malikism of both Qayrawan and Cordoba which he used as a vehicle for the ‘true’ Islamisation of the Ṣanhāja and the hardening of their resistance to the numerous ‘Alid, Fāṭimid and Khārijite trends upheld by rival tribes in the northwestern Sahara. According to Ibn ‘Idhārī, he had tried to engage the Maṣmūda tribes first but one of their shaykhs replied to his appeal for them to unite as fellow Muslims, ‘None of us will be content to obey the rule of someone without a tribe’, encapsulating the religio-political environment described above.¹⁶ Under Ibn Yāsīn’s guidance, the Almoravids erupted from the Sahara in the 1050s to conquer what is now modern Morocco, western Algeria, and the half of the Iberian peninsula lying south of a diagonal line running from the Algarve to Catalonia. Although much of the contemporary writing about the Almoravids has been lost and we frequently view them through the hostile lens of their successors, the Almohads, certain instances in the medieval Arabic historiography of the period hint at their sense of Islamic society or, perhaps more accurately, the striving of Mālīkī jurists and Arabised chroniclers to fit them into such a schema.

Most notably, the Almoravid rulers took the title *amīr al-muslimīn* and proclaimed their loyalty to the ‘Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, just as the latter was emerging as the ultimate source of normative Sunni religio-political authority in the so-called ‘Sunni revival’.¹⁷ This was an unprecedented step in a region where previous adherence to the ‘Abbasids had been limited to short-lived rebellions in al-Andalus but it chimed with the affiliations of the resurgent Mālīkī jurists of Qayrawan who had sponsored the early Almoravid movement and it gave the Ṣanhāja tribal chiefs at its head a new imperial Islamic status which distinguished them from other Maghribī chiefs in the way that adherence to the Umayyads had elevated certain Zanāta chiefs but on a much grander scale that transformed them into regional ‘commanders of Truth’. What this substitution of tribal for Islamic leadership meant to the Almoravids, their subjects, and their opponents remains a matter which can only be partly elucidated through analysis of scattered episodes and texts which preserve (or construct) a narrative of righteous rule.

Within the extant chronicle tradition, Malikism provided the Almoravids with a legal

¹⁶ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, vol. 4, pp. 9-10.

¹⁷ The dating of this, like other events in the early Almoravid decades, is not consistent in the Arabic chronicles and may have taken place as early as the 1060s or as late as the 1090s. Evariste Lévi-Provençal, ‘Le titre souverain des Almoravides et sa légitimation par le califat ‘abbāsīde’, *Arabica* 2: 3 (1955): 265-80, pp. 268-70; Vincent Lagardère, *Les Almoravides I*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1989, pp. 165-6; Amira K. Bennison, ‘The necklace of al-Shifā’: ‘Abbasid borrowings in the Islamic West’, *Oriens* 38 (2010): 249-73, pp. 269-72.

framework for attacks (*jihād*) against their tribal rivals which first appears in accounts of their conquest of the important commercial centre of Sijilmasa in the Ziz valley below the High Atlas mountains in 1054 or 1055. Founded in the eighth century, probably by the Kharijite Banū Midrār, Sijilmasa hosted the Fatimid imam ‘Abd Allāh prior to his triumphant return to Ifriqiya in 909. In the ensuing decades, its Midrarid amirs switched their allegiance between the Fatimids and Umayyads until they were ousted by Zanāta Maghrāwa warlords whose allegiances were more solidly Umayyad. Kharijism, Ismā‘īlī Shi‘ism and Malikism are thus likely to all have had exponents in Sijilmasa in addition to there being a thriving Jewish community. In addition to this religious variety, one line of traditions about the Almoravid conquest cites the oppressive rule of the Zanāta as its trigger and claims that on their arrival in the city, the Almoravids smashed musical instruments and burnt down wine shops.¹⁸ Sijilmasa emerges from this narrative as the antithesis of a ‘good’ Islamic society, characterised by religious disunity, tyrannical government and moral laxity all of which the Almoravids redressed by imposing just and moral rule upon the city. The reality was undoubtedly more complex: the Almoravids probably had not fully developed a translocal Islamic identity at this point and some sources recount that the inhabitants of Sijilmasa rebelled against the Almoravids, necessitating a second conquest of the town,¹⁹ but the symbolic value of the account remains.

Another hint of the Almoravids’ claim to Islamic normativity occurs in reports of their conquest of Aghmat, north of the High Atlas, a few years later. Here the Almoravid amir, Yūsuf b. Tāshfīn, is described as imposing a heavy levy (*farīḍa thaqīla*) on the large Jewish population, implying the establishment of ‘normal’ *dhimma* rules concerning the *jizya* which may not have been operational in Aghmāt previously.²⁰ The Almoravids are believed to have had a similarly strict attitude towards maintaining *dhimma* boundaries in al-Andalus. However, this is an area where the impetus probably came from urban Andalusī Mālikī jurists concerned that the Andalusī *ahl al-dhimma* should not have undue power, wealth or influence over Muslims, rather than from the Ṣanhāja amirs.²¹

¹⁸ Ibn Abī Zar‘, *Rawḍ al-Qirṭās*, pp. 161-2.

¹⁹ Ibn ‘Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, vol. 4, p. 12.

²⁰ Anon, *Kitāb al-Ḥulal al-Mawshiyya fī Dhikr al-Akhhbār al-Marrākushiyya*, Tunis: Maṭba‘at al-Taqaḍḍum al-Islāmiyya, 1979, p. 13. This work has recently been attributed to Ibn Simāk al-Mālaqī.

²¹ The Sevilan *muḥtasib* Ibn‘Abdūn, whose manual is reviewed below, was one Andalusī jurist keen to impose boundaries between religious communities that were clearly being breached in the daily life of Seville. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abdūn al-Tujībī, *Risāla fī l-Qaḍā’ wa l-Ḥisba*, edited by Muṣṭafā al-Ṣamadī, Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2009, pp. 107, 112, 113-4, 127-8; *Séville musulmane au début du XII siècle. Le traité d’Ibn ‘Abdun sur la vie urbaine et les*

That is not to say, however, that the Almoravid amirs did not understand the value of the *sharī'a* to their empire. Camilo Gómez-Rivas has explored the implications of the Almoravids' adoption of the Mālikī *madhhab* not just as a legal school but as a juridical framework for empire, and in that sense part of the project to impose religious homogeneity under the *amīr al-ḥaqq* in place of the multiple interpretations of Islam at play in the western Maghrib.²² For the Almoravids, *al-ḥaqq*, a word connoting truth, religious law and the rights of God, was Islam mediated via the Mālikī school, its Maghribī missionaries, and its jurists from Qayrawān and then al-Andalus who joined the movement. The Almohad critique that the Almoravids were the dupes of a class of conservative and ill-informed *fuqahā'* conceals the importance of the Mālikī jurists in creating a coherent religio-legal system from Córdoba and Seville down to the new Almoravid capital, Marrakesh, and their Saharan centre of Azuggi. Whilst it would be naïve to imagine that the tribes of the vast deserts, mountains and plains of the region were fully integrated into this imperial legal administration, its reach far exceeded anything that had gone before.

An insight into the Mālikī view of state-society relations in the Almoravid era comes from the famous manual of Ibn 'Abdūn al-Tujībī of Seville on the judiciary (*qaḍā'*) and market regulation (*ḥisba*) which not only catalogues good market practice but also comments on appropriate relations between social groups and the ruler's responsibilities in maintaining a good societal balance from the perspective of a practitioner rather than a philosopher. Like other Andalusī Muslims who served as Almoravid judges, officials and scribes, Ibn 'Abdūn walked a fine line between supporting the Almoravids as protectors of the Andalusī portion of the *dār al-islām* against Christian encroachment and resenting them as outlandish desert tribesmen with only a bare comprehension of Andalusī society. His manual, therefore, exhibits a combination of attitudes ranging from idealism, promotion of his own moralistic and juridical agenda, and invective against the flawed social reality he witnessed around him.

Ibn 'Abdūn begins with the standard view that the ruler (*ra'īs*) is the pivot of the circle, which will only remain perfectly round and free from deviation if the pivot is true.²³

corps de métiers, edited and translated by E. Lévi-Provençal, Paris: Maisonneuve, 1947, pp. 108-9, 112, 114, 128. For an analysis of these sections, see Alejandro García-Sanjuán, 'Jews and Christians in Almoravid Seville as portrayed by the Islamic jurist Ibn 'Abdūn', *Medieval Encounters* 14 (2008) pp. 78-98.

²² See Camilo Gómez-Rivas, *Law and the Islamization of the Maghrib under the Almoravids*, Leiden: Brill, 2014.

²³ Ibn 'Abdūn's use of the term *ra'īs* rather than *amīr* or *sulṭān* echoes al-Fārābī's terminology but it may also reflect the fact that Seville was a governorate of the Almoravid empire and thus the seat of an Almoravid governor rather than the Almoravid amir and the existing tendency in al-Andalus to call political leadership *riyāsa*.

However, he knows all too well that it is rare to find such a man and he laments, ‘But where is he? Where?’²⁴ The absence of a perfect ruler leads Ibn ‘Abdūn to identify the real lynchpin of the system as the judge, a Mālikī jurist, who must work with the political head of the community’s chief advisor (*wazīr*) to elevate the ruler’s aspirations towards the hereafter as well as the world and its pleasures. The shortfall between the ideal and real makes the achievement of a good society utterly dependent on the appointment of a clement but firm judge who can provide the necessary oversight of affairs assisted by his staff. In other words, it is not the Almoravid *raʾīs* who truly makes a just society in eleventh-century reality but the *qāḍī*.²⁵

Martinez-Gros argues that this position reflected Ibn ‘Abdūn’s own status as an urban Andalusī jurist who perceived the great mosque as the heart of the city and the judge as the representative of both religion and the urban population in the face of Almoravid Maghribī conquest.²⁶ Intriguingly, there were a number of occasions in eleventh century Andalusī cities when judges did take power that may have inspired Ibn ‘Abdūn but many such experiments were shortlived and several such judges took the title *raʾīs* or *amīr* and appointed a new judge.²⁷ Reality therefore presented the conundrum that the judge who desired to exercise leadership tended not to possess the characteristics required of both offices, suggesting that the two positions could not be conflated and, however flawed, were complementary in the pursuit of a just and stable political and social order.

When Ibn ‘Abdūn moves on to the maintenance of justice, his first priority is fair taxation which may reflect genuine concern for the ordinary population or the importance of sustenance to his ideal city. Therefore, the group against whom he inveighs most bitterly are the agricultural tax assessors (*al-khurrāṣ*, sing. *khārīṣ* - from *kharaṣa* meaning both to estimate and to lie) and tax collectors (*qubbāḍ*, sing. *qābiḍ*, literally a ‘grabber’) whom he sees as immoral, corrupt and sinful.²⁸ His concern to protect the peasantry and rural

²⁴ Ibn ‘Abdūn, *Risāla*, p. 41; *Traité*, p. 8.

²⁵ In the ‘Governance of the Solitary’, Ibn Bājja argues that the presence of a judicial system was one indication of the imperfection of a state since in the perfect city, everyone would agree and interact harmoniously. Ibn Bājja, ‘The Governance of the Solitary’, translated by Lawrence Berman in J. Parens and J. Macfarland (eds), *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press (2011), p. 100.

²⁶ Gabriel Martinez-Gros, ‘Le gouvernement du juge: Ibn ‘Abdun et Séville au debut du XIIeme siècle’, in Thierry Bonzon (ed.), *Idées de villes, villes idéales*, Fontaney: Saint Cloud, 1993, pp. 37-49, p. 41.

²⁷ For a detailed exposé of these cases, see Maribel Fierro, ‘The *qāḍī* as ruler’, *Saber Religioso y Poder Político en el Islam*, Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional, 1994, pp. 71-116.

²⁸ Ibn ‘Abdūn, *Risāla*, pp. 42-46; *Traité*, pp. 10-14.

proprietors in general from harsh and oppressive taxation evokes eastern circle of equity formulations in which prosperity depends upon stable production and just tax collection to fund the army and government, so that the ruler is equipped to maintain peace and stability as custodian of the *sharī'a*. While in al-Andalus, taxation was an accepted part of life and Ibn 'Abdūn's discussion revolved around licit and fair taxation, in the Maghrib this era witnessed the first major state efforts to actually gather rural taxes as well as the *jizya*, mentioned above. The Maghribī tribes may not have considered Ṣanhāja-directed tax collection as equitable at all and their rising opposition to the Almoravids in the early twelfth century may thus have involved resistance to incorporation into such an extractive Islamic state structure, the *makhzan*,²⁹ as well as the theological issues foregrounded in the chronicles.

From the tribes' perspective, the Almoravids' Truth (*ḥaqq*) was iniquity of economic, political and religious dimensions. The most fervent critics of the Almoravids were the Almohads, a coalition of Maṣmūda tribes led by Muḥammad b. Tūmart, a charismatic firebrand preacher from the Sus valley south of the High Atlas mountains, who criticised them for their cultural divergence from Islamic norms, the illicit taxation they levied despite their promises to the contrary, military failure against the Christians of northern Iberia and 'ignorant' religious leadership. The Almohad denunciation of the Almoravids on the grounds of religious ignorance was encapsulated in the accusation that they were anthropomorphists (*mujassimīn*) who wrongly understood Qur'anic verses referring to God's corporeality literally rather than metaphorically. Ibn Tūmart viewed this weakness in religious interpretation as a particularly serious issue because he believed that rulers should instruct and guide their subjects in religion, not simply rule over them and leave religion to the 'ulamā'. It was not enough to defer to the *qāḍī*: a perfect society required a suitably qualified ruler which the Ṣanhāja could not provide.

The Islamic ideal of a universal religio-political ruler, an imam, had finally taken root in the rather unlikely soil of the High Atlas mountains among Maṣmūda Berber tribesmen whom the chroniclers agree were largely rural, illiterate and berberophone. The Almoravids had introduced a religio-political revolution designed to sweep away religious, legal and political diversity and institute a truly Islamic society in the Maghrib only to fall victim to their own success as the idea of an Almoravid *amīr al-ḥaqq* was replaced by that of the Almohad *mahdī* and his caliphs, who reconceptualised the Almoravid 'emirate of Truth' as ignorant, misguided and depraved.

The Utopia of the Almohads

The Almohad revolution which overthrew the Almoravid empire and established a

²⁹ In Moroccan Arabic *makhzan* (storehouse) is the word commonly used for 'government'. Bennison, *Almoravid and Almohad Empires*, 2016, p. 177.

new larger one in its place, stands out for its ideological radicalism and its self-conscious reenactment of Muḥammad's prophetic mission. The career of the *mahdī*, Muḥammad b. Tūmart, was framed in later decades as a calque on the Prophet's own career, replete with an iniquitous city (Almoravid Marrakesh), a cave retreat in the Sūs valley, a *dār al-hijra* (Tīnmāll), and a purge of lukewarm 'hypocrites' from the new Almohad community after its establishment at Tīnmāll. The chosen people in this scenario were not the Arabs but the Maṣmūda tribes of the High Atlas, assisted by other Berber tribes, who would carry forth the revived message of Muḥammad as explicated/voiced by the *mahdī* Ibn Tūmart and his caliphs, the Mu'minids, at a time when Islam's true message was all but lost.³⁰

The Almohads viewed their message not simply as revived and restored Islam but as pure Abrahamic monotheism (*tawḥīd*) which all Muslims, Christians and Jews should accept, rendering sectarian division and the *dhimma* a dead letter. From the Almohad perspective, the multiplicity of sects and political fragmentation in the Middle East was a sign of religio-political degeneration, confirmed by the successes of the Crusaders prior to the Zangid and Ayyubid responses. The loss of Toledo to Castile in 1085 signalled the similar bankruptcy of the Andalusī Ṭā'ifa kingdoms and the Almoravids who had failed to regain it. As a consequence, the perfect society which the Almohads envisaged was not the mature Islamic society of their day in which a variety of communities offered their submission to the Islamic political order in accordance with their beliefs as Muslims or as contractual Jewish and Christian minorities' (*mu'āhidūn*) of one denomination or another, and received protection and justice in return. Instead the Almohad utopia was theoretically totalitarian, requiring the obedience and submission of all to the *mahdī* and his message, disseminated by cadres known as *ḥuffāz* and an upper echelon of ideologues called the *ṭalaba*, drawn from a variety of backgrounds, thus subsuming previous tribal, local and religious identities into a new hegemonic Muslim identity.³¹

This entailed a radical rewriting of the existing social contract between ruler and ruled, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish, which historians have viewed as aberrant, violent or intriguing, depending upon their perspective.³² The revolutionary conquest era presided over by 'Abd al-Mu'min witnessed preaching, religious debates and instances of forcible conversion in urban areas to religiously homogenise society. The Almohad era as a whole also witnessed repeated efforts to 'command the good and prohibit wrong' in order

³⁰ The idea of the Berbers as a new chosen people is explored by Ignacio Sánchez, 'Ethnic disaffection and dynastic legitimacy in the early Almohad period: Ibn Tūmart's *translatio studii et imperii*', *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies* 2: 2 (2010): 175-194.

³¹ As Maribel Fierro notes, the Almohads may initially have called themselves, 'the believers' (*mu'minūn*). M. Fierro, 'Spiritual alienation and political activism: the *ḡurabā'* in al-Andalus during the sixth/twelfth century', *Arabica* 47: 2 (2000): 230-260 p. 232.

³² For the impact of the Almohad revolution on religious minorities see Author (2010).

to create the just and virtuous society envisaged by the *mahdī*,³³ and, one might argue, attract the different communities in the empire to the Almohad project and give them a stake in it, from the ruling elite down to the subject ‘flock’. As scholars have noted, the Almohad empire’s ideology set it apart from other Islamic regimes of the time, in which a *de facto* separation of political, religious and judicial powers had occurred, by restoring the caliph-imam as the fount of justice, knowledge and prosperity that flowed down to the Almohad ruling class and then through society.³⁴

This idealistic and centralising vision is expressed in a missive from ‘Abd al-Mu’min to the Almohad scholars in al-Andalus, composed by the caliph’s chief scribe and advisor, Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, on 16 Rabī‘ I 543 (4 August 1148). It places emphasis on the achievement of both justice (‘*adl*) and virtue or perfection (*faḍl*), through *ḥisba*, enjoining the good and prohibiting wrong, one of the two crucial religio-political institutions covered by Ibn ‘Abdūn in his Almoravid-era manual, considered above. This gives some flesh to the theoretical bones of Almohadism and a sense of how the concept of a just salvific society flowing from the *mahdī* informed Almohad governance.³⁵

The letter’s context, the building of the Mosque of the Mahdī at Tīnmāll, the empire’s ‘symbolic centre’,³⁶ provides an opportunity to talk about the Almoravid era as one in which the wellsprings of *baraka* had run dry but now flowed again from the *mahdī* to enable the Almohad ‘man of knowledge’ (‘*ālim*) to achieve eternal life freed from personal desires, the need to oppress others and self-indulgence as he meted out justice within society. However, the letter states, the intermediaries between the enlightened Almohads and the population are guilty of many behaviours that compromise the ethical society envisaged by the *mahdī* and his caliph. The Almohad *ṭalaba* and tribal shaykhs must therefore take their positions of responsibility seriously and monitor affairs closely to avoid the series of wrongdoings (*munkarāt*) listed in the letter. These include several very specific misdemeanors which suggest real problems such as whipping people to extort money from them, levying illicit taxes and dues, prohibiting harbour entry without payment, and buying and selling slave girls without waiting to see if they are pregnant by their former master. The letter also calls on the Almohads to take action against the illicit sale of

³³ For the Almohad view of *ḥisba* see, Vincent Cornell, ‘Understanding is the mother of ability: responsibility and action in the doctrine of Ibn Tumart’, *Studia Islamica* 66 (1987): 71-103; Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 427-59; Author, 2016, pp. 246-50.

³⁴ Pascal Buresi and Hicham El Aallaoui, *Governing the Empire: Provincial Administration in the Almohad caliphate (1224-1269)*, Leiden: Brill, 2013, pp. 162-169.

³⁵ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm al-Jumān li-Tartīb mā Salafa min Akhbār al-Zamān*, edited by Maḥmūd ‘Alī Makkī, Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1990, pp. 187-203.

³⁶ Buresi and El Aallaoui, *Governing the Empire*, p. 156.

alcoholic beverages, and also against state couriers who impose upon the people on their route for food, shelter and animal fodder in an extortionate way, and the purloining of supplies from state storehouses (*makhāzin*) without permission from the caliph.

In several places, the injunction to Almohad officials to exercise their faculties (*ijtahada*) to command the good and prohibit wrongdoing is combined with instructions to inform the caliph before imposing punishment. Wrongdoers should be arrested but then the caliph must be consulted and, on no account, should anyone carry out the death penalty without reference to the caliph, the supreme earthly judge, who will decide upon the correct *sharī'a* punishment.

Woe betide any one of you who disobeys this order about executing anyone we have mentioned, whether his crime among you is large or trifling. Instead bring his offence to our attention after imprisoning and shackling him so that we can punish him as we see fit and divine law (*ḥaqq*) may take its course.³⁷

This clearly points to the early Almohad caliphs' insistence upon personal oversight, as deputies of God and the *mahdī*, and their rejection of the Almoravid amirs' reliance on the jurists to make decisions. At the end of the letter, 'Abd al-Mu'min exhorts the *ṭalaba* to circulate it through society, giving an insight into the dissemination of messages from the top and the attempts of the Almohads to generalise their message and provide moral leadership throughout society. 'Gather together all the scholars (*ṭalaba*) and officials (*ummāl*) in your regions to confer on this letter' and make its implementation a priority, 'recite it to the masses (*al-kāfa*) from the tops of the *minbars* and summon the delegations from the tribes, both nomadic and settled, and make them understand it with eloquence and clarity (*ifṣāḥ^{an} wa-i'lān^{an}*).³⁸ Then 'When you have finished reciting it to the masses (*al-jamāhīr*)...make copies of it for every tribe of the district (*naḥr*), and every province and impose upon them the implementation in all its facets of the task that we have imposed upon you.' But also 'warn them against opposition to it for there will be no excuse for anyone who does not make it his immediate goal'.³⁹

While the Almohad caliph appears in this missive as the true pivot of the circle, there is also a certain stress on individual responsibility and inclusion when 'Abd al-Mu'min explains the reason for the dissemination of the letter and the proper application of *ḥisba* using a Qur'anic verse, 'For God Most High says, "Indeed the believers are brothers", so

³⁷ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Nazm al-Jumān*, p. 196.

³⁸ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Nazm al-Jumān*, pp. 200-1. This formulation, *ifṣāḥ^{an} wa-i'lān^{an}*, may indicate the dual use of Arabic and Berber to ensure the tribes' comprehension.

³⁹ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Nazm al-Jumān*, p. 201.

inculcate in them this fine belief seeking God's approval'.⁴⁰ This Qur'anic reference elides differences of tribe, village or town in preference for the Almohad community of believers. At various intervals, later caliphs also took an active stance towards *ḥisba* and cultivated a sense of fraternity with the wider community. 'Abd al-Mu'min's grandson, Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr, started his reign with a series of actions against moral infractions in Marrakesh, followed up by instructions to Almohad governors in other cities to follow suit. As Ibn 'Idhārī puts it, when he reached Marrakesh for the first time after his accession in 1184, he was shocked and angered to find 'wantonness openly declared and [people] competing to satiate their passions and business flourishing in the slave market for female singers and entertainers'. In response,

He commanded that intoxicating beverages be poured away and prohibited, and warned that their use would be punishable by death. He dispatched missives to that effect to all the provinces and cities and the amount poured away was worth a vast sum. The letters putting this into effect included sections on the spreading of justice and insisted that officials and governors must treat the subject flock well with the object of giving them satisfaction in the fulfilment of their rights, the staying of the hand of their oppressors, and permission to plaintiffs and the oppressed to cross the sea [to see the caliph].⁴¹

Ya'qūb al-Manṣūr also held public sessions in the great mosque for ordinary plaintiffs to come before him, including those with complaints against members of the elite, a process Ibn 'Idhārī says was eventually halted due to security concerns and the frivolous nature of some pleas.⁴²

An unfortunately undated epistle presented to 'Abd al-Mu'min (d. 1163) by one Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ṭāhir,⁴³ a jurist from Murcia, preserved in Ibn al-Qaṭṭān's chronicle, presents a more philosophical view of the Almohad religio-political mission. In his epistle, the author presents a series of proofs that Ibn Tūmart is the *mahdī* by means of a fictional dialogue between his 'serene soul' (*al-naḥs al-muṭa'mina*), characterised by logic and rationality (*al-naṭqiyya wa'l-fikriyya*), and his 'soul governed by evil' (*al-naḥs al-ammāra bi'l-sū*'), characterised by its habit of dissent and argument (*al-naḥs al-nuzū'iyya*). In the prelude to the dialogue, however, Ibn Ṭāhir describes his own situation by contrasting the decadent

⁴⁰ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm al-Jumān*, p. 202.

⁴¹ Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, vol. 4, pp. 244.

⁴² Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-Mughrib*, vol. 4, pp. 244-5

⁴³ The editor of the *Naẓm al-Jumān* identifies Ibn Ṭāhir as the scion of the family which ruled Murcia during the Ṭā'ifa era. He was appointed as governor of the city in Almohad times and died in Marrakesh in 574 (1178-9). Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm al-Jumān*, p. 101, n. 1.

cities of the Almoravids with the Almohad perfect or virtuous city (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*), using vocabulary and concepts evoking the eastern Islamic philosopher al-Fārābī and his western successor, Ibn Bājja.⁴⁴ However, the aim here is not to explore the intertextuality of this epistle but to highlight the public presentation of such ideas before the caliph. The epistle begins by saying,

I was anxious of heart and desperate for kindred spirits because I was living in cities of ignorance (*mudun jāhiliyya*) in the midst of corrupt and despicable behaviour, destructive rebellions, and circumstances altogether fearful and grave. Indeed every troublemaker among them encouraged forbidden evils and put pressure on us to join him in such perilous acts. Meanwhile I desired a virtuous city, just governance, and perfect lawful ways - migration to such a place is both a legal and a rational necessity, and may be viewed as a natural right - and I was a stranger in this world, so weary of life that it seemed better to die than to live but then one of the brethren came and informed me that he was one of the migrants to the presence of the imam of the Muwaḥḥidīn who was called in truth Commander of the Faithful, ‘Abd al-Mu’min b. ‘Alī, may God Most High be satisfied with him, and I breathed in the fragrant scent of a lawful life and I felt in every fibre release from these cities of wrongdoing and ignorance.⁴⁵

It continues to stress the wrongs in the Almoravid empire using established philosophical categories of imperfect states: ‘Are not the cities of the Mulaththamīn (Almoravids) misguided (*dālat^{an}*), sinful (*fāsiqat^{an}*) and degraded (*khabīthat^{an}*), vile in the extreme, and dominated by force.’⁴⁶ The author’s critique then turns to the crucial issue of

⁴⁴ For a more detailed consideration of the philosophical and mystical uses of the idea of true Muslims as strangers (*ghurabā’*) in decadent times and how this theme combined with political activism in the twelfth century, see Fierro, ‘Spiritual alienation’. Since this epistle apparently predates the death of ‘Abd al-Mu’min in 1163 it is earlier than Ibn Rushd’s exploration of similar topics in his commentary on Plato’s *Republic* which was probably completed around 1195. A. Chahlane, ‘Logique et politique dans les commentaires d’Averroes’, in J. Hamesse and O. Weijers (eds), *Écriture et réécriture des textes philosophiques médiévaux*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, pp. 1-22, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm al-Jumān*, p. 102. Compare with al-Fārābī, *The Political Writings*, pp. 60-1. ‘The virtuous person is forbidden to reside in the corrupt regimes and it is obligatory for him to emigrate to the virtuous cities if any exist in actuality in his time. If they are non-existent, then the virtuous person is a stranger in this world and miserable in life; death is better for him than living.’

⁴⁶ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm al-Jumān*, p. 103; al-Fārābī, *Mabādi’*, pp. 252, 256.

the leadership provided by the ruler which reminds us also of Ibn ‘Abdūn’s lament that in practice it is virtually impossible to find a good ruler.

The [Almoravids] drive themselves and the people to bovine acts (*af‘āl bahīmiyya*)⁴⁷ and they turn themselves and [their charges] away from beautiful, lawful acts. They render the people mere instruments so that they can dominate them with wealth, honours and every pleasure. They forget God and He forgets them.⁴⁸

It is the role of the *mahdī* to ‘extinguish this fire’ and ‘elucidate the lawful path and the route to the afterlife’ rather than ‘the way of ignorance and corrupt, worldly politics,’⁴⁹ and he transfers this task to his caliphs who cannot be distinguished from him and perpetuate his presence, a task we have already seen ‘Abd al-Mu’min and his descendants taking on through the public exercise of *ḥisba* and judicial oversight. The epistle then moves to the proofs that Ibn Tūmart is the *mahdī*, culminating with the mutual conviction of the two facets of the soul and Ibn Ṭāhir’s decision to join the Almohads. Ibn Bājja’s decision to retreat from the imperfect society around him was thus replaced by Ibn Ṭāhir’s more triumphal vision of migration to a virtuous city that existed through the restoration of law (*shar‘*) at the hands of the enlightened Almohad caliphs.

Conclusion

This idealistic vision inevitably elided many of the harsher aspects of the Almohad political experiment and the limits to the forcible integration of tribes, sects and urban communities into the Almohad new order. Although these issues cannot be explored here in detail, it is important to note that tensions existed between the Mašmūda Berber Almohad cadres and other Berber tribes such as ‘Abd al-Mu’min’s own Kumiya tribe and Ṣanhāja ‘converts’. The status of Hilālī Arab tribal auxiliaries recruited from Ifriqiya such as the Riyāḥ and Khulṭ was also ambiguous and the extant sources do not describe them as ‘Almohads’ suggesting only partial integration into the Almohad system. For the most part, the Almoravids were excluded from the new order and persecuted. The epistle of Ibn Ṭāhir justifies this by assimilating the Almoravids to the Jewish tribes who rejected Muḥammad, thereby denouncing both groups and all those who hear the message of the *mahdī* but fail

⁴⁷ Although *bahīmī* is sometimes translated as ‘bestial’, the imagery here is not of wild beasts but of dumb livestock (*bahā’im*) driven here and there.

⁴⁸ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm al-Jumān*, p. 103; Compare with al-Fārābī, *The Political Writings*, p. 28.

‘They rule despotically and set the inhabitants of the city down as things similar to tools for them to gain pleasures and wealth’.

⁴⁹ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Naẓm al-Jumān*, pp. 103-4.

to accept it.⁵⁰ Where the forced conversion of *ahl al-dhimma*, Jews in particular, occurred it went on to produce the same societal anxieties about their secret maintenance of their previous faith that all such waves of forced conversion create. The Mālikī *fuqahā'* also remained deeply attached to their *madhhab* and the majority never fully accepted Almohadism. Last but not least, the perennial issue of socio-economic justice through fair taxation and good governance was just as impossible for the Almohads to address as for the Almoravids.

However, the very fact that in the mid-twelfth century a Murcian jurist could address a Kumiya Berber caliph using Islamic philosophical vocabulary of eastern provenance shows how far ideas of the ideal Islamic society had permeated into the Maghrib over the preceding centuries. In the first centuries after the conquest, it was the *qabīla* or tribe and the rulings (*aḥkām*) of tribal chiefs rooted in local customs and beliefs which dominated and the city was the imagined world of Córdoba or Baghdad rather than the bustling but still small towns emerging in the Maghrib. The rise of the Fatimids and the rival expansion of the Umayyads of Córdoba provided a catalyst for the Maghribī tribes to fit themselves into larger regional formations and this was followed by the great imperial religio-political projects of the Almoravids and the Almohads. The value of rule by the Almoravid *amīr al-ḥaqq* and the Almohad *maḥdī*, theorised by educated urbanites, depended on the belief that happiness was not simply a matter of this world but of the hereafter and that justice and virtue within society revolved around membership of the community of believers not one's tribe, sect or town. Although neither regime could truly map their Islamic ideals onto reality, by the end of the Almohad era, the idea of normative urban-based Islamic rule had become generalised throughout the Maghrib and the sectarian tribal landscape of preceding centuries had changed dramatically and permanently.

⁵⁰ Ibn al-Qaṭṭān, *Nazm al-Jumān*, p. 108.